

When we think about the law chances are the Ten Commandments come to mind: love God, remember the Sabbath, don't take the Lord's name in vain, honor your father and mother, don't kill, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness or covet your neighbor's people or property. And yes these are law but there are a total of 613 laws in the Hebrew Bible. The Law served to separate Jews from other groups of people—the laws showed who belonged to Judaism, who belonged to God. Paul says, "There is no longer Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female; we are all one in Christ Jesus." In Jesus it is no longer the law that shows who belongs to God, faith does, "We are saved by grace through faith. It is a gift from God, not a result of something we do." As Paul wrote the words, "Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female," those groups still existed separately in his culture, he is saying that God doesn't discriminate based on these categories. God's love is for all and isn't earned but freely given by God—that's grace—free gift.

"There is no longer Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female; we are all one in Christ Jesus." No longer Syrian or American, police or civilian, black or white, Christian or Muslim, we are all one in Christ Jesus. It's not that differences don't exist between these groups, but that God doesn't discriminate based on these differences and that these differences don't need to separate us. These verses are a call for us to make true—there is no longer Syrian or American, police or civilian, black or white, Christian or Muslim, we are all one in Christ Jesus. We are called to build bridges, not walls.

Four weeks ago I stood on a hill overlooking a wall the boundary between the Golan Heights and Syria. It is a beautiful area filled with fruit trees and vineyards. The hillsides were decorated by the red of wild poppy flowers and in the distance, maybe three football fields away, was a high fence with razor wire on top, marking the boundary with Syria. As my group stood there in silence I thought about many things. I remembered the prayers I'd prayed for Syria in the last six years of war and felt solemn for the lives that have been devastated by the war. Max, the Biblical Archeologist that was helping to lead our group, had done much of his research in Syria and had told us many stories about how he loved the country, its culture and the wonderful people he had worked with and gotten to know well. With his stories the pain of the Syrian war became more than news stories, there were now names that had stories. Also as I stood on that hillside I look into the distance knowing that Damascus was just thirty miles away, thinking about the apostle Paul's encounter with the resurrected Jesus on his way to Damascus, was I standing in the place Paul had met Jesus.

It is so easy to feel separate from people and places that are far away and maybe we do this to assure our selves what has happened to them won't happen to us. I thought that about Syria. Did you know that in 2010, before the war, Syria had more tourists then Australia and for a good reason. Syria is home to six UNESCO World Heritage sites. People came to explore ancient Roman ruins, bustling market places, Mediterranean beaches and mosques from the early days of Islam. 18% of Syrians have advanced degrees compared to 11% of Americans. Did you know that in the last six years of war

food costs have soared by as much as 900%. 11.2 million Syrians are homeless and 5 million have become refugees.

One take-away from my trip to the Israel/Palestine is how much we have in common with people of different cultures. Don't get me wrong, my life and upbringing is very different from the two Palestinian Muslim guys I talked with one night in Jerusalem, but as we sat and talked and crack peanut shells into a bucket, we talked about kids and wives, parents and siblings, jobs and where we would like to travel. As we talked I looked down the street and could see the ancient wall that encircles Old Jerusalem. What if there was no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, Syrian or American, police or civilian, black or white, Christian or Muslim? What if we were all one in Christ Jesus? How do we make that happen?

Pray. Pray that the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies us, and keeps in the in one true faith—that our faith would be our center, not a wall keeping others out. And that our prayer and the Holy Spirit would send us out, with our faith at our core we might move about enjoying and learning from people of different cultures. That the love that is a free gift given to us by God would fill us to overflowing and that love of Jesus would spill out of us to bless all people, even those we think different. We are saved by grace through faith, not a result of works. In Jesus belonging to God becomes a gift freely given and the joy of receiving that gift turns us in love toward our neighbor. Jesus says, "They will know you are my disciples by your love."